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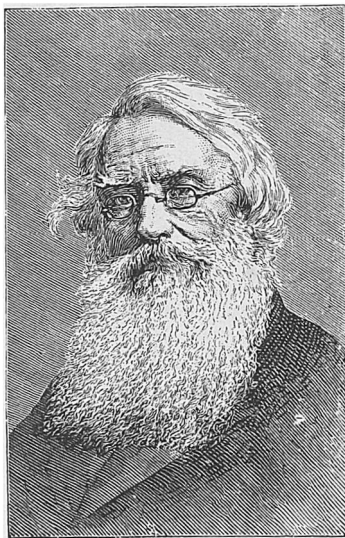
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## EARLY ACADEMICIANS.

### CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY.—MORSE, DURAND, CUMMINGS AND PAGE.

IN Twenty-second Street, within sight from Fifth Avenue, stands a house of brown-stone (in very little unlike the long rows which palisade the street westward to Sixth Avenue, except for the growth of wisteria which mantles it) bearing upon its front, above the parlor windows, a slab of white marble with the inscription: "IN THIS HOUSE, S. F. B. MORSE, THE INVENTOR OF THE

TELEGRAPH, LIVED MANY YEARS AND DIED." The most eloquent tribute of the historian or the poet could do no more for the man whose memory this sentence embalms. He belongs so completely to the world, to which he left such a priceless heritage, that the wanderer from any quarter of the globe would apprehend the meaning of



S. F. B. MORSE.

this memorial without the explanation of a cicerone or a guide-book.

Only a few brisk steps from the house in which "S. F. B. Morse, the Inventor of the Telegraph, lived many years and died," is another structure toward the rearing of which his fertile brain and busy hand did much. The inventor of the telegraph (the developer of it would be a better character-

ization of him, by the way), as the founder of the National Academy of Design, did not give so great a boon to the people as he did in the web of iron with which he bound the peoples of the earth together, but in it he gave them a treasure of which the value is not to be appraised

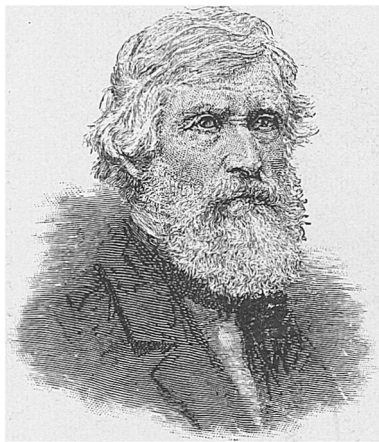
by commercial rules, and the influence of which is not to be estimated by the same scale as the operations of the markets or the movements of statecraft.

It was the same hand which, later, sent the first message over the trembling wires between Baltimore and Washington, that wrote, sixty years ago come next June, this little note, addressed to each of a dozen or so of the men who practiced art for a profession in New York :

"Please come to my room, 96 Broadway, this evening, at eight o'clock, and partake of strawberries and cream."

The greatest events are "born of trifles." In this note of less than a score of words, lay the foundation of the first real art organization of the Western Continent. Strawberries and cream are not the food for giants, but this dish, eaten in the gloaming, when the boys of New York were chasing fireflies in the thickets of the City Hall park, fed a veritable giant into lusty life.

At the time SAMUEL FINLEY BREESE MORSE invited his brother-artists to his room, he and they had a grievance that



ASHER B. DURAND.

vexed them sorely. The American Academy of Arts, founded in 1802, and governed by gentlemen who were not artists, after having once died out, had been revived in 1816, and its by-laws had been given such a revision that artists were actually excluded from the director-

ship of the institution in which they were chiefly interested. There were only three artists in the board of eleven directors; and a section of the law relating to exhibitors which read: "All artists of distinguished merit shall be permitted to exhibit their works, while amateurs shall be invited to expose in gallery of the Academy any of their performances," proved highly offensive to the profession. Moreover, Colonel Trumbull, the Director of the Academy school, ruled it with such an unfriendly and autocratic sway that he eventually discouraged and drove from it even the students who, in their art enthusiasm, entered willing

to submit to the unjust and rigid regulations he imposed. "Beggars should not be choosers" he remarked on one occasion, when remonstrated with by a member of the Academy concerning the inconveniences to which the students were subjected on account of certain arbitrary rules which were of no possible benefit to the institution, and this expression added to the indignation which brought about an open rupture between the Academy and the artists. The meeting in the studio of Morse inaugurated an era of good-feeling among the latter, and at his suggestion, the question of forming an Association for the promotion of the arts of design was given to debate and consideration. Later, after other meetings, on the evening of November 8th, 1825, the artists met in the rooms of the New York Historical Society, with Asher B. Durand in the chair and S. F. B. Morse as secretary, and that evening the New York Drawing Association was formed.

Painters, architects, engravers, and sculptors were admitted to membership in the new society, each paying his share of the expenses. They met for drawing three times a



THOMAS SEIR CUMMINGS.

week, from six to nine o'clock in the evening, each member furnishing his own materials. Members coming in after the organization was formed paid a fee of five dollars.

This was the beginning of the National Academy of Design. For a few months the association

continued merely a study club, and efforts were made to secure it a representation in the Academy, from which, indeed, the casts they drew from were borrowed. Six of the members of the Association were promised seats in the Board of Academy Directors, but when it came to a vote, only two were chosen, though the Association had contributed \$100 as fees for four of its members who were not stockholders in the older institution. The two who were elected then refused to take their seats. After this, there could be no sympathy between the two societies, and on January 14th, 1826, the Drawing Association met and constituted itself THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN. The work of organization was completed two evenings later, thirty artists being interested in it.

Out of this new National Academy of Design also grew *The Century Club* of to-day. Shortly after the Academy was founded, three of the Academicians—Durand, Cummings and Ingham, organized *The Sketch Club*. Its purpose was purely social, and its first meeting was held in the house of Thomas Cole. In 1844, this club was reorganized as *The Artists' Sketch Club*, and after a couple of years, its members founded *The Century Club*.

The National Academy of Design, upon its incorporation, opened an antique school in the Philosophical Society's building. A life school was added later. The first exhibition of the Academy was held in some second-story rooms at Broadway and Reade Street, in May, 1826, and 170 pictures, were shown.

The movements and exhibitions of the new Academy, and the curious details attending them, were given in ACADEMY NOTES last year. The career of the institution was vicissitudinous; it had its narrow escape from extinction more than once. But it fought its way, growing stronger in corporate and artistic strength, and becoming every year more and more a part of our city and our national civilization. As its founders passed away, new and stronger men moved forward into their places. Each exhibition demonstrated the vigorous life and intelligent progress of the society, as well as of the outside artists whom its encouragement inspired to labor and improvement. Its schools became the model of their kind, and the nursery of the foremost talents of the time.

The two surviving members of the Academy at its foundation, ASHER B. DURAND and THOMAS SEIR CUMMINGS, can look with eyes of pride upon the work which they began sixty years ago, and which undoubtedly has far exceeded their expectations, in its march towards an artistic perfection which they probably did not dream of when they laid the foundation upon which it has been built up.

Bowed by his fourscore and ten, ASHER B. DURAND's last years are slipping through his idle fingers, amidst the nature he loved so well and did so much to glorify. It is some years since he touched a brush, and indeed a life whose labor in the realm of art began in 1812, deserves its furlough in 1885. From an apprentice boy to a copperplate engraver, Mr. Durand toiled his way up until he became a master of the craft, and of another nobler one as well. In 1836, when he abandoned the graver for the brush, he was one of the best engravers of flesh representation known to the time. He readily established himself as a portrait painter, and his landscapes are among the gems of early American art. After a visit to Europe in 1840, he settled down in New York, succeeding Morse as President of the Academy in 1845, and holding the chair for seventeen years. In 1869, he made a pilgrimage back to the old homestead at the foot of Orange Mountain, to finish his life in the house

where he began it, under the murmuring oaks whose rustle was his lullaby and will be his requiem. The old house in Amity Street, where he lived so many years, still stands—now a squalid tenement, grimed and with its windows darkened by the railroad in the air, but making a sturdy fight against decay.

The eighty-one years of General THOMAS SEIR CUMMINGS rest almost lightly upon him. In its earliest days, one of the Academy's most energetic and spirited members, so he remains among its halest and most vigorous. General Cummings is of English birth, but was brought to New York when an infant. He studied the rudiments of art in the spare hours he had while serving in his father's counting-room, and graduated from a clerk's desk to an easel, in the studio of Henry Inman. Young Cummings was one of the most persistent students whose desire to study art so disgusted Colonel Trumbull, and he enjoyed more than one verbal bout with that testy autocrat. He infused his whole spirit into the formation of the rival association when the old academy refused him the encouragement he demanded, and during his entire connection with the National Academy, was inexhaustibly fertile in ideas and indefatigable in labors for its service. The schools of the Academy owe most of their perfection to him, and between the miniature painting which made him famous, and his duties to his classes, he was one of the busiest of men. He still found time, however, to do duty in the Militia, where he commanded a regiment for several years, and in which, in 1838, he was commissioned Brigadier-General by Governor Seward. General Cummings was an author as well as a soldier and a painter; his *Historical Annals of the National Academy of Design* form a complete history of that institution from its foundation to 1865. Shortly after the latter year he went into retirement on his Connecticut farm.

Another veteran, who, though not one of the founders of the Academy, belongs to its early membership, is WILLIAM PAGE. In 1819, an eight year old boy, he came to New York from Albany, where he was born, to study drawing. In 1822, he received a premium from the American Institute for a drawing in India ink. The objection, common at the time, to art as a profession, led his parents to devote him to the study of the law, but he found the office of Frederick de Peyster far less attractive than the studio of Herring, to whom he soon attached himself as a pupil in the art of portraiture. From the studio of Herring, he went to that of Morse, and, through his master's influence, was received into the new National Academy as a student in the antique class. His drawings here won him a silver medal, and there seemed every likelihood that he was fairly launched on an artistic career, when he experienced a change of spirit, joined the Presbyterian Church, and began the study of theology, intending to fit himself for the

ministry. In 1830, however, he returned to the palette and the easel, which he thenceforth abandoned no more. In a very few years he had won for himself a reputation as a painter of brilliant gifts and great promise. He was made a member of the Academy in 1836, and was its president from 1871 to 1873. In 1844 he began painting in Boston, and from 1847 to 1849 lived in New York, adding triumph to triumph. During a trip abroad, he absorbed the noblest lessons of the works of the great masters, and his copies of Titian are said to have been so remarkable as to be readily confused with the originals. His works betray the influence of the great Italian, both in color and treatment, and in many essentials possess a nobility and dignity no other American artist has achieved. It is only a year or so since his busy hand ceased its active labors, and during its work of forty diligent years, it gave our art a standard in works which brought it fame. William Page is living in an embowered retreat at Tottenville, Staten Island, and it is to be hoped that he will remain with us many years longer.

Beyond those already named, few men of the early days of the Academy linger with us. JOHN EVERS, jovial and light of heart, with the spirit of a boy under the exterior of an octogenarian, passed away last year. The present President of the Academy looks back serene and dignified in an old age of honor and fame, over the fifty years which have elapsed since he began his study in the same studio with Page under the founder of the house he now presides over. It is forty years since President HUNTINGTON became a member of the Academy. But older than he, in years and service, is ROBERT W. WEIR, whose connection with the Academy began in 1829, but who has taken no active part in its exhibitions for many years,—leaving his talented sons to represent him. For the rest, the gravest participants at the council board are but youngsters of twenty or thirty years service, beside whom their seniors appear veritable patriarchs.

There is an oriental fable of a lamp, which, by its magic flame, gave life to all it shone on, reviving the dead and stirring into activity all the latent goodness of the defenders of its sacred fire. The lamp around which the Drawing Association gathered in the days when art in New York had little more than bare existence, may not have been as potently endowed as that of the Persian story teller, but its flame has spread and brightened with a radiance that has warmed a nation's art to life, and has lighted it upon its way to greatness.

ALFRED TRUMBLE.

The Portraits which accompany this article have been reproduced in reduced size, by kind permission, from *Harper's Magazine*. The portrait of Morse, from the article, "The First Century of the Republic," (April 1876), and the portraits of Durand and Cummings from a paper on "The National Academy of Design" (May 1883).